United Nations E/2008/65

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 May 2008

Original: English

Substantive session of 2008
New York, 30 June-25 July 2008
Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Coordination, programme and other questions

International cooperation in the field of informatics**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2007/14, in which the President of the Council was requested to convene the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics for one more year to enable it to continue its efforts to act as a bridge, with regard to information technology, between the evolving needs of Member States and the actions of the Secretariat.

The report highlights the continuing cooperation of the Working Group and the Secretariat, which has resulted in practical enhancements in the area of technology that facilitate the work of Member States and Observers of the United Nations, as well as of non-governmental organizations accredited to the United Nations.

* E/2008/100.

** The submission of the present document was delayed in order that the relevant information could be compiled.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2007/14, the Economic and Social Council requested the President of the Council to convene the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics for one more year to enable it to carry out, from within existing resources, the provisions of its resolutions on international cooperation in the field of informatics and to facilitate the successful implementation of the initiatives of the Secretary-General with regard to the use of information technology.

2. The Council requested the Working Group to continue its efforts to act as a bridge between the evolving needs of Member States and the actions of the Secretariat. The Working Group has continued to collaborate closely with the Secretariat to direct its existing resources in practical ways that best meet the needs of Member States with regard to the everyday use of information technology in accomplishing the work of the diplomatic community associated with the United Nations.

3. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/283, recognizing the strategic importance of information and communications technology as a critical reform instrument, established the post of Chief Information Technology Officer, who, in consultation with stakeholders, produced a comprehensive information and communications technology strategy for the Secretariat (A/62/793 and Corr.1). The strategy provides a knowledge management component that will contribute to providing a framework for enhancing international cooperation in the field of informatics by the Secretariat.

II. Cooperation between the Working Group and the Secretariat

4. The Working Group and the Secretariat have maintained effective cooperation. During 2007, the focus of cooperation continued to be informal meetings specifically related to cooperative efforts between the Working Group and the Secretariat.

5. The Secretariat and the Working Group continue to expand their efforts with regard to website tools and to maintain shared responsibility for the creation and maintenance of web pages and for document updates.

6. With the guidance of the Working Group, the Secretariat continues to expand its efforts to more fully utilize CandiWeb, a website built in support of the elections process. Working within existing resources, the Secretariat continues to engage volunteers, Secretariat staff and the staff of permanent missions to create, maintain and support the site.

7. Building on its successful efforts with CandiWeb, the Working Group decided to broaden the reach of web-based tools and expand this mode of working-level coordination to similar information repositories of interest to permanent missions. In that regard, the Secretariat has developed websites for all the Main Committees of the General Assembly.

III. Connectivity and access

8. The Secretariat maintains wi-fi connectivity and dedicated Internet access points for delegates throughout public areas and conference rooms of the New York campus. Plans to adjust wi-fi coverage will be made throughout the duration of the capital master plan in order to maintain continuity of connectivity during meetings, conferences and events, as well as to maintain access to such resources and tools as CandiWeb.

9. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management continues to support and improve the online process for requesting bilateral meetings. Member States directly submit requests electronically for bilateral meetings using the e-Meets system. The Department is also developing an information technology solution for the Protocol and Liaison Service to facilitate the process of accreditation of delegates of the permanent missions.

IV. Information technology services

10. As mentioned above, the Secretariat and the Working Group have cooperated to create a prototype website on United Nations elections and candidatures. CandiWeb makes use of existing Secretariat facilities, and maintenance of the site is shared by the diplomatic community and the Secretariat and is coordinated by the Working Group. The Secretariat and the Working Group will continue to improve the site and its operation in the coming year while maintaining the ease of use that has made it a very useful tool for the diplomatic community.

11. Expanding on the successful implementation of CandiWeb, the Secretariat and the Working Group plan to address more comprehensively the particular information needs of delegations by implementing a Member State portal to replace the current top-level website for the permanent missions (http://www.un.int). The portal will provide improved and consolidated access to both information and services for the diplomatic community.

12. The Secretariat provides website services for many permanent missions and is currently involved in moving a number of websites over to a standard web content management system. The system will streamline permanent mission websites and provide an easy-to-use interface for missions to use in updating and maintaining their content while providing enhanced information security.

13. The Secretariat continues to provide e-mail services to the permanent missions. In 2007, with the cooperation of the Working Group, the Secretariat successfully migrated e-mail services from a non-standard platform to the standard platform used within the Secretariat. This has improved the reliability and maintainability of e-mail services and has significantly reduced duplication of effort.

V. Training, support and awareness

14. The Working Group continues its focus on awareness and is gradually moving the results of its efforts online. The guide to Internet services for delegations will be updated and incorporated into the permanent mission portal described above.

15. The Working Group and the Secretariat continue to explore the idea of establishing a forum in which the diplomatic community and the Secretariat can exchange information and views concerning information and communications technology in the Secretariat, including strategies and initiatives, as an extension of the Working Group's focus on awareness and to serve as an additional bridge between Member States and the Secretariat in the area of informatics.

16. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continues to enhance its programmes for training in the management and use of United Nations documentation, as well as in the use of internal and external online databases and resources. Delegations have taken advantage of personalized coaching sessions and customized group programmes within the scope of the Personal Knowledge Management initiative, which provides assistance on the use of information-handling tools and resources. In 2007 more than 270 mission staff participated in the Library's training or coaching programmes.

17. In order to improve communication with delegations, a key component of knowledge-sharing, the Department of Public Information and the Department of Management have been working jointly to identify cost-neutral measures to enable relevant information posted on iSeek to be made available to Member States; iSeek content will be included on the Member State portal accessible only to the permanent missions.

18. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) is also active in providing training for mission staff, especially those new to New York. Its information and communications technology policy seminar series was developed to stimulate critical thinking and to provide a forum for discussion and learning related to the potential policy implications of information and communications technologies. UNITAR also offers courses to some 50,000 beneficiaries who participate in its e-learning courses on debt and financial management, peacekeeping, multilateral diplomacy and environmental law. The Institute is enhancing its efforts to broaden the use of instructional technology to cover new demand for training related to social and economic development, aiming to reach an additional 40,000 beneficiaries from Member States annually.

19. The Department of Management provides technical support, typically through the Information Technology Services Division help desk, whenever there are problems with services or infrastructure. In 2007, more than 1,727 calls from permanent missions were handled by the help desk.

20. The Secretariat continues to refurbish older personal computers that are no longer needed and to furnish them to missions, under the overall guidance of the Working Group. Statistics on computing equipment donated to permanent missions in 2007 are contained in the annex.

Annex

Personal computers given to permanent missions

Equipment type	*Number*
Central processing units	1 082
Monitors	1 035
Printers	315
Other devices	3
Total	**2 435**